

Northwest Briefs

Idaho wilderness plan advances

WASHINGTON (AP) — A conference committee of Congress Wednesday approved legislation to implement a management plan for the Gospel Peak-Buffalo Hump region in Northcentral Idaho, but not before deleting a provision which mentions snowmobiles.

Sen. Frank Church, D-Idaho, announced the agreement in a release from his Washington office.

The plan was contained in a bill establishing wilderness areas in several Western states. The bill provides for both multiple-use and wilderness in 343,000 acres in Idaho County.

Church and Sen. James A. McClure, R-Idaho, opposed

the deletion of the snowmobile provision, but the Senate conferees voted 5-2 to remove the reference. The provision would have allowed snowmobiles to use Bear Grass Ridge between Square Mountain and Buffalo Hump in the winter months if the Secretary of Agriculture found such use caused no harm to wildlife or wilderness values. Both Church and McClure said they found the snowmobile provision reasonable, however, their colleagues didn't agree.

However, Church said, the conference report will contain language which insures existing roads which penetrate into the wilderness area from both east and west be maintained and marked in winter for snowmobile use.

"That language will insure that local people have access to the very heart of the wil-

derness, Church said. He added he was "disappointed the Senate conferees voted to remove provisions for snowmobiles in the wilderness itself."

The House conferees also voted to accept the Senate version, and defeated a proposal by Rep. Steve Symms, R-Idaho, which would have removed the wilderness designation for Gospel Hump.

"We've moved this legislation another step toward final enactment, and we've demonstrated once again that this plan can point the way toward resolution of volatile land management disputes," Church said.

The Gospel Hump compromise was worked out last spring by members of the Grangeville Chamber of Commerce and conservation organizations.

Under the legislation,

about 206,000 acres of land in the Gospel Peak-Buffalo Hump areas in Northcentral Idaho will be designated as wilderness while 137,000 acres will be added to the allowable cut for Idaho County.

"This proposal is unique," Church said. "It was drawn up by local people to meet local needs. It assures that after years of delay, the wood products industry is assured of trees for local mills, and continued jobs in the areas. At the same time, it provides new wilderness values," he said.